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THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The Scope and Nature of Social Psychology

This paper defines social psychology as the science of differential action of persons. Action is defined as attitudinally directed behavior with respect to socially structured alternatives. Personality consists of the organization of cognitive and affective relationships to objects. Attitudes are affective orientations to particular social objects or classes of social objects. Attitudes are enacted by persons in social contexts. For the most part, social psychology is concerned with the influence of the personality and the social context on action, and with the social factors influencing personality. Moreover, action outcomes are behaviors with respect to socially defined objects. Hence, social psychology is equivalent to "social structure and personality".

In predicting action outcomes with respect to objects the relevant characteristic of both social context variables and personality variables (except for the attitude toward the object or related objects) is the facilitation they offer for enacting the attitude. If true, this suggests that the basic "formula" for predicting action outcomes is:

$$A_c = f\ (A_t; F_1, A_t; F_2, \ldots A_t; F_n)$$

A_c = The overt action variable.

A_t = The attitude toward the object.

F_i = Each facilitational variable, including both personality and social structural variables.

Several logical problems as well as substantive questions are discussed. Among them are observations leading to slight modifications of the formula.

This view of social psychology thus emphasizes action, treating interaction as a special and important case of action. The view obviously runs

counter to positions which equate the field with the study of communication or which define it as "psychology applied to social problems". At the present, social psychology cannot be reduced either to psychology or sociology, but is partially dependent upon both and contributes to both.

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Social Psychology is a field of theory and research stemming from several sources, especially sociology and psychology. It is of great concern not only to these disciplines but also to economics, political science, education, communications, and other areas. Because, historically, it has had its theoretical roots in several traditions of sociology and psychology and because presently it has applications in a variety of disciplines, it is not surprising to find that there is quite a diversity among its several expressions. Some aspects of it are useful in one discipline; other aspects in other disciplines. Thus, the basic ideas of the field which are talked about by people of one discipline are not necessarily identical to those discussed by people of another. Its terminology, too, is confusing. This is hardly surprising in view of its varied exponents. But when it happens, as it often does, that those of one tradition use one word for a certain phenomenon while those of another use a different word for it, and that those of different traditions may use the same word for different phenomena, it is, to say the least, difficult to gain a grasp on the field as a whole. However, simple differences in words and perspectives do not stand in isolation from social life. Organized groups which are the bearers of intellectual traditions have tremendous influence on systems of theory. It is entirely possible that the unification of theory in social psychology, parts of which are important to many organized groups, may well be delayed indefinitely because it has no one cross-disciplinary group supporting it. Even assuming that it is logically possible, such a unified theory can be formulated only when there is considerable communication

among the groups which are exponents of various facets of it. Probably the necessary degree of communication does not exist. And of course we do not know whether such a unified theory is possible.

In any case, the manifestations of this variety of interests are many. There are those who think that social psychology is the foundation of all the social sciences. Some of these people identify the field as "behavioral science", often identifying it with the analysis of role behavior, which in turn is viewed as the concept providing the meeting ground of all the social sciences. There are those who believe that social psychology is really a contribution to psychology in that it shows how interpersonal relations influence behavior. Others believe that social psychology is the discipline which underpins sociology in that it explains why interaction, which to some is the basic concept of sociology, is possible. There are those who think that social psychology explains behavior, and there are those who think it explains personality.

It can be argued that several writers, notably M. B. Smith, Milton Yinger, and Alex Inkeles, have recently redefined the field in terms of a pair of central problems. Broadly speaking, these are the development of personality and the influence of personality and social structure on behavior in society. Smith explicitly defines the field as a concern with such focal problems, and it appears that Inkeles does so implicitly (although it is difficult to follow parts of what he says on the subject). These writers thus tend to define the field as concerned with the relationships between social structure and personality.[1/] The concern with personality development turns out in this formulation to be first, the influence of social structure on personality, and second, the isolation of the mechanisms by which the influence makes itself felt. The concern with behavior turns out to be first, the influence of persons on each other in socially structured situations; second, the influence

of personality on the selection of individuals into various sectors of the social order; and third, the influence of personality and overt behavior on states and changes of social systems.

This paper presents a point of view which seems consistent with the broad view of social psychology which equates it with social structure and personality, yet which gives the field a central unit--something which is lacking in definitions which are based exclusively on concerns with "focal problems". That unit is the action of persons with respect to objects. It is my hope that the view does justice to the theoretical concerns of psychologists and sociologists, and perhaps others, who are interested in the field.

Central Concepts

The central concepts of this point of view are personality, social structure, attitude, and overt action. The main reason why social psychology is concerned with personality is because personality is thought to be one of the main sources of similarities and differences in overt human action. That is, social psychologists assume that under exactly the same situational conditions any two persons will act at least somewhat differently because of previously-formed personality differences. The field is concerned with social structure because it forms the context which is assumed to mold personality and to channel its expression in overt behavior, and because it sets goal alternatives. Hence, it too, is a main source of similarities and differences in human action. That is, social psychologists assume that even if the personalities of two individuals were identical, their behavior would differ because of differences in the structure of situations in which and with respect to which they act. Of course, there are no such things as identical personalities or identical situations in the real world. But there are apparently differences in both which vary in degree. The question is, exactly which aspects vary to what

to what degree and how do we know which aspects are relevant for which actions?

Personality. Like any other phenomenon, personality may differ in a multitude of ways. The total number, if there is any such thing, may never be exhausted. Even so, a theory of personality must try to do justice to this variation--this "uniqueness" of each individual human being. There are ways of bringing a certain amount of order into the area.

For one thing, we can order many phenomena along continua. When this is possible, we can measure degrees of difference among persons along any particular continuum. If we can find some way of distinguishing between continua and among levels of any one continuum we can reasonably locate each person according to his position on each of several variables. Broadly, this gives us a way to account for uniqueness in an orderly and useful manner, but it doesn't tell us anything about personality as such. We turn next to this.

Basically, we view the personality as the cognitive and affective relationships of an organism to objects. Each personality differs to some extent from every other personality because of variations in the objects cognized and in the affective relationships to them. The personality variables which are accessible to the person himself are attitudes (affect-loaded cognitions) and beliefs (simple or relatively affectless cognitions) about specific objects. Others are inaccessible to him but nevertheless real. The latter variables are sets of attitudes and beliefs which tend to vary together. They are inaccessible to the person because to recognize them it is necessary to have considerable information about the cognitions and the likes and dislikes of many persons. Obviously most people do not and cannot have such detailed knowledge. But there are some ways by which research workers can isolate them. The main method for doing this is factor analysis of reported attitudes and beliefs. Perhaps R. B. Cattell has done more work of this sort than any other. The trick is to know which of the multiplicity of possible factors is most

important. Cattell solves part of this for his pruposes by elaborate studies of the correlation among variables presumably suggested by profound observations made by outstanding psychologists. Progressive refinement has reduced these to perhaps twenty factors which seem to be both theoretically and empirically different.[2/] (Ultimately, however, a systematic theory will be needed to suggest fundamental personality variables--whether accessible or nonaccessible. My guess is that this will come from the analysis of the structures of social systems as perceived by the actors participating in them).

Apart from the personality variables which are inaccessible to the person, there are many others he knows about. These refer to attitudes and beliefs concerning which interpersonal comparison is simple enough to permit the subject to develop awareness of similarities and differences between himself and them.

In short, the word "belief" is defined here as a cognition with little or no affective loading. Attitudes are defined as cognitions with relatively strong, or with variable, affective loading. These are the "building blocks" of personality. They are best treated as a large number of variables. Some of these variables are inaccessible to the person, and some are accessible. Both classes have effects on behavior. The ways to use them in explaining and predicting behavior are complex. We shall try below to give some leads as to how this may be done. First let us turn to the concept of social structure.

Social Structure. Excluding the effects of personality on social structure, there are, broadly speaking, two ways of treating the relationship of the person to the social structure, each of which depends upon what it is that the researcher wishes to study. First, social structure may refer to the organization of behavior alternatives. All or most of the objects with respect to which action may occur are consensually defined, and many of these are themselves social groups or aspects of organization of social groups. The social object itself determines in part what are the behavior alternatives which are

possible with respect to it. If one wishes to explain and predict behavior, he must know what are the behavior alternatives from which the person must choose. This is a complicated matter. It is easy to assume that one chooses between A, or B, or C, etc., and that choosing one precludes choosing the others. In fact, this is only one instance--the case of mutually exclusive alternatives. Frequently, however, choosing A has no bearing whatsoever on choosing B. This may be considered the case of independent alternatives. There is a third type, in which choosing A permits but does not require choosing B, but not choosing A exludes choosing B. This is the case of contingent alternatives. (Contingent alternatives are especially important when the objects to which they refer are structures standing in an ends-means relationship to each other, a case we shall return to later.) For all of these cases it is more useful to consider the main alternatives as A or not-A, B or not-B, C or not-C. This becomes somewhat more complicated when the alternatives are not dichotomous (as in A and not-A) but are, in the extreme, continuous variables. Even more, the objects to which the alternative behaviors refer may be highly stable structures in the sense that they are clearly consensually defined and are durable, or they may be quite unstable in the sense that they may not be well defined or may be ephemeral. The occupational prestige hierarchy of western society is one example of the former, and the shifting definitions of the situation which are characteristic of mob behavior are examples of the second.

Another way of treating the social structural effects on personality in the field of social psychology is as a learning environment. That is, personality is developed in socially structured situations. There are ways this occurs. For one, the types of information (role definitions, other norms, beliefs, attitudes) which are presented to the person by others vary systematically according to broad social structural factors such as position in a

stratification system, diversity and density of population, etc. Obviously this influences the cognitive system of the person. For another, once attitudes are learned and have become fairly stable, the person's attempts to enact them may be aided or inhibited in part by the structure of the situations in which he attempts to carry them out. Success in such attempts seems at least to confirm that aspect of the state of the personality, while failure produces various changes in it. Of the latter effects the most important may be the tendency of the attitude to disappear when the various attempts to enact it have been blocked. For example, successful attempts to enact a certain level of aspiration do not lower the level; they may even raise it. On the other hand, failure reduces the level of aspiration.[3/] If the attitude variable has as its object some aspect of the social system which is exceedingly important, this would indicate an important change in personality. Finally, if a successful attempt to enact an attitude leads one into a new situation, one with a different set of norms, etc., than were characteristic of his previous position, he would evidently change aspects of his personality--the relevant cognitions and affective relationships--to conform with it. For example, studies of entrance into new groups, which once may have been nothing more than objects of levels of aspiration, show that the new member takes on many attitudes characteristic of the group. Indeed many people begin to take on such attitudes in anticipation of becoming members.

Attitudes. As we have noticed, attitudes (as treated here) may be considered as part of personality. Yet sometimes they appear to function differently from other personality variables. As we noted earlier, in this formulation an attitude is view as a cognition of and an affective relationship toward an object or class of objects. This definition excludes purely cognitive factors such as beliefs and those psychological elements which in the hypothetical extreme are opinions (except when they are the affect zero-points of attitude

variables). It includes, on the other hand, such things as goal orientations and levels of aspiration. None of the former but all of the latter imply the existence of affective relationships toward their objects. We assume that, except for the other factors in its (the attitude's) environment, the attitude would always be carried into overt behavior. In any case, in principle, attitudes toward an object tend to be positively correlated with overt action toward that object.[4/] Thus the attitude is part of the act. Naturally, the attitude is not directly observable, because it is merely an affect-loaded cognition, and neither affect nor cognition can be observed directly.[5/]

So far we have treated the alternative behaviors possible with respect to an object as being determined, at least in part, by the attitude toward that and no other object. The issue is not that simple. In some of our own research the prestige levels of the occupational structure form the alternative levels of achievement (overt actions) that are possible. The structure is the occupational prestige hierarchy and levels of it are the possible objects of attitudes. The level an individual selects as "best" for him is the specific object of his attitude (or, more specifically, level of aspiration) in this framework. This is a goal-structure, or (more generally) it is the structure of the object of an attitude.

Attitudes toward objects other than the one we are focusing upon also can have effects on overt behaviors with respect to the object. It is a sociological commonplace for people to speak of the educational system as the mechanism for allocating people into different levels of the occupational prestige structure. In American society it is generally believed that the "way to get ahead" is to become educated; "the more education you get, the better the jobs you can get". For our purposes this belief signifies that the various levels of the educational system may be treated by the participants in the society as a "means system". More generally, one set of actions may be defined as being

necessary for the enactment of another. We may speak of the former as "means behaviors"; they occur with respect to "means systems". We may speak of the latter as "object behaviors"; they occur with respect to "object systems".

This has at least three general consequences. (1) Attitudes toward objects are positively correlated with overt actions with respect to the alternatives presented by their means systems. (2) Attitudes toward one or another of the alternatives in means systems are positively correlated with overt action with respect to their object systems. For some examples, level of occupational achievement is positively correlated with years of college completed, and attitude toward attending college is positively correlated with level of occupational achievement. Neither of these, however, should be as high as the correlation between an attitude and the behavior with respect to its own object. It should be noted that sometimes alternative means systems exist. This leads to still another generalization: (3) The larger the number of alternative means systems, the lower the positive correlation which will be observed under (1) and (2) above.

The central point here is that attitudes which are not directly related to the object of the attitude we are studying can influence behavior toward that object when the behaviors which are their logical outcome are differential means for realizing the first attitude.

Action. You have probably already noticed that we are defining action as a sort of paraphrase of Parsons and Shils' definition.[6/] It is attitudinally-directed overt behavior. Unlike the units of personality (cognitions of and affective relationships toward objects) which are states of organism-object relations from the point of view of the subject, overt actions are attitudinally-directed changes in organism-object relations which may be directly perceived by persons other than the subject.

The execution of the attitude in overt behavior is aided or impeded--that is, differentially facilitated--by aspects of the personality other than that attitude and by factors in the social situation. In theory, differential attitudes, personality variables, social situational variables, and overt behavior dimensions are all measurable, and in theory the first three can be combined in such a way as to account for all of the variations among persons in overt behaviors.

Explaining and Predicting Action

By now it should be clear that in this paper social psychology is the science which takes the differential action of persons in their social contexts as its central subject matter. As things stand today, there are several explanations for acts. Probably most of them are wrong in important respects. A valid explanation must, when coupled with appropriate research techniques, yield empiracally verifiable predictions about the relationships among the variables of the explanation. Such a valid explanation should tell us the ways to select and combine variables so that they will account for the variation in overt behavior with respect to the object of the attitude. The fact is that we are notoriously deficient in this respect. Oddly, however, we tend to look to factors other than fallacious explanatory systems to account for this deficiency, if indeed we even recognize it. Some seem to hold that feeling that one has explained the act is a substitute for demonstrable evidence. This cannot suffice in an empirical discipline. Others hold that social psychology is a new science with "underdeveloped" research techniques, and that this is why our theories do not account for the observed variations in their domain. I doubt that this is the basic difficulty. But there is a good deal of truth in it nonetheless: our methods of measurement and verification are quite imprecise. Even so, the quality of our research techniques is not alone enough to explain our poor predictive efficiency. Perhaps, we

could do a better job of empirically accounting for differential action if we took a new look at how to combine the variables which measure our key concepts. In doing so, we should recognize that an explanatory system which yields accurate prediction in a laboratory may still be deficient when it is taken to the field. So let us try to develop systems for explaining action which are capable of being rigorously verified under field as well as laboratory conditions.

The present point of view seems to provide a basis for a system. It is too early to guess whether it will be successful; it too may join that overpopulated limbo of false hypotheses. Even if later it appears to be successful, the tests will be limited because they are being conducted on actions with respect to highly stable objects. One, which we have worked on with I. W. Miller, concerns the levels of achievement with respect to the occupational achievement prestige hierarchy.[7] Another, conducted by Anthony Diekema, concerns levels of achievement of students in a university.[8] Both of these, especially the former, require long-term research and it will take a long time before all of the results are available. A third, unpublished, concerns joining or participating in on-campus groups. The structure of each of these is quite durable, lasting long enough for the individual to develop stable attitudes toward it and to conduct a large number of more specific acts carrying the focal attitude into overt behavior.

Briefly, since action is the unit we wish to study, these projects treat the attitudinal component (the affective orientation to an object) of the act as the central action-impelling factor and the overt behaviors with respect to the object of the attitude, or related objects, as the central end-product. The measured attitude level is viewed as the indicator of the degree of effort the person will exert to perform at a certain level of overt behavior (if the object-structure is a continuum) or to perform the behavior (if the alternative behaviors are dichotomous). Here, aspects of the personality other than the

attitude toward the object, as well as social situational variables, are treated as members of one class, differential facilitation variables. In so doing, the system departs from formulations which treat personality variables and situational variables as members of two functionally distinct classes. This is because it appears that the functional distinction should be made at another point. First, the attitude toward the object performs an impelling function in the explanation and prediction of overt action; and second on the whole, other variables perform the function of either aiding or hindering--in short, differentially facilitating--the expression of this impellent in overt behavior.

Let us use levels of occupational achievement as the overt behavior we wish to predict. It seems only common sense to suppose that if one's level of occupational aspiration is quite low, it really does not make much difference how great his opportunities (social structural variables) and "abilities" (personality variables) are for higher levels of occupational achievement; he simply will not be a high achiever because his energies are not directed toward that end. Similarly, if his level of aspiration is high but his opportunities and abilities are low, one can hardly expect very high achievement. Only when both are at least relatively high can we expect that the person will be a relatively high achiever. Now this means that the level of overt behavior is a function of a non-linear combination, more or less like a multiplier effect, of the attitude variable and the facilitation for its expression which is offered by other variables, personal and social structural[9]. We think the same holds also for any other attitude variable the object of which is a stable entity.

A number of general "equations" has been proposed for combining variables to empirically account for variance in behavior variables, including action variables. We shall not review these, except to mention that they usually

assume either additive effects of all classes of independent variables or else they assume more or less multiplicative effects between personality variables on the one hand and social situational variables on the other. The scheme just outlined leads to a different basic "equation". There are again two classes. But here one of the classes has only one variable, the attitude toward the object, and the other class contains all facilitational variables. It is these two classes which stand in a higher order relationship to each other. It is as follows:

$$A_c = (A_t; F_1, A_t; F_2, \ldots . A_t; F_n)$$

where A_c = the overt action variable

A_t = the attitude toward the object

F_i = each facilitational variable, including both personality and social structural variables

(The semi-colon means "more-or-less multiplicative", and the comma means "more-or-less additive".)

Problems in Operationalizing the "Equation". Obviously this is not an exact formula, though it seems closer to reality than some. As a matter of fact, even if it is basically correct one can be fairly certain it will need to be modified for reasons we shall now present.

For one, this does not tell one how to choose variables which may be likely candidates to fulfill the function of differential facilitators because the exact facilitation variables which are relevant for one action variable are not always the same as those which are relevant for another. There should be a set of guidelines for hypothesizing exactly which of all possible facilitational variables are worthy of consideration. Such a set of guidelines does not exist. As a start in this direction, one could suggest that variables describing differential reference group support for the relevant behaviors, norms governing differential access to the object, self conceptions of and objective indicators of ability to perform the specific tasks required, and

attitudes toward related objects, might be general classes of facilitational variables. Nevertheless, whatever the particular rules that may be eventually decided upon, it seems apparent that they must include a reference to the object itself and to other objects that may stand in an ends-means relationship to it. The guidelines for selecting facilitational variables apply not only to behavior regarding the object of the action, but also those regarding means systems providing behavior alternatives upon which the overt behavior with respect to the object may depend.

Another problem concerns the proper role of attitudes toward objects standing in a means-ends relationship to each other. To the extent that the distribution of persons along one social structural variable automatically allocates them along another[10/], the attitude toward either should function as an impelling force for the other. Returning to an earlier example, in American society there is evidently an ends-means relationship, even if imperfect, between educational achievement and occupational achievement. To the extent that this is true there should be a non-linear (more or less multiplicative) relationship between educational aspiration level and occupational achievement level. It seems apparent that at least for this reason the above formula is oversimplified. That is, in some cases, the attitude toward related objects seems to fulfill the same function in the equation as does the attitude toward the object itself. A modification of the equation is evidentally needed to take this possibility into account.

Third, there is in fact not only an interaction between attitudes toward objects and the facilitational variables which should tend to yield a strong multiplier effect. There are also other interactions between them which should reduce that effect. There are two ways this can happen. The most important is the fact that facilitation influences attitudes. As we noted earlier in another context, it has been known for years that when the obstacles

to goal achievement are high the goal itself becomes less attractive to the person, and there is some reason to believe when the obstacles are low the goal orientation is high. Also, there is no reason to doubt the possibility that highly motivated people can manipulate their situations to some extent, thus reducing the obstacles. Since goal orientations are just another way of talking about attitudes, and obstacles are just another way of talking about differential facilitation, what applies to one should apply to the other. These add up to hypothesizing a positive correlation between levels of aspiration and levels of facilitation. We have looked into this regarding levels of occupational aspiration, and the predicted correlations between levels of aspiration and levels of facilitation are present[11]. In general, this means that the above "equation" must be modified to take into account the influence of attitude level and facilitational levels on each other.

Fourth is the zero-point problem. In some attitude variables there is no meaningful zero-point, yet the "equation" assumes that such a thing exists in that it involves manipulations which are multiplicative. There may be no final solution to this probability yet, operationally, it might be treated by using a computer to vary systematically a set of arbitrary zero-points on both the attitude and the facilitational variables, and to hunt for an optimal solution. The optimal solution would be the one which maximized the variance accounted for in the overt action variable.

Limiting Cases: Action in Unstructured Situations. All of the above assumes stability of the structure of the object and of the personality and social context within which the attitude is carried into behavior. In fact, there are many situations where this does not hold--mob behavior or disaster behavior for two. My guess is that in principle the same ideas apply, but that the possible objects of action and the behavior alternatives regarding them are changing so rapidly that overt behavior directed toward one set of objects

turns out to be irrelevant as these objects change and new ones emerge. Similarly, the facilitation offered by situation may be changing rapidly so that even if the object is stable, the behavior alternatives with respect to it cannot be acted upon by the person. In any case, if on the whole this frame of reference works in explaining and predicting action toward stable objects in stable situations, research should be undertaken to learn whether it is applicable in principle to action toward unstable objects in unstable situations. This might be done experimentally by progressively reducing the stability of the objects and situations to the point where the predictive efficiency of the system breaks down completely.

A Special Case: Interaction. As treated here, interaction is an important special case of action. Presumably it is the case in which the overt behaviors, and therefore situations of each of two or more persons are progressively altered because their actions with respect to each other tend to produce new cognitions and perhaps related affects in each. A guess might be that the same basic sets of variables might be used, though they would be complicated by the fact that each person is altering the state of the variables defining the situation (objects of action and/or facilitation of context variables), for the other, and therefore altering the cognitive and effective relationships of the others to the objects in the situation. It would thus not seem too difficult in theory to treat interaction within the above framework. In practice, however, reformulating the "equation" to fit this case might be a difficult task.

Major Problems in This Formulation

There are at least three theoretical problems with this point of view, each of which might mean that its promise is greater than it is really capable of producing. The most important two of these we shall call the "identity of objects" problem, and the problem of "determining the dimensions of behavioral

alternatives". The least important we shall call "Himmelstrand's problem".

The "Identity of Objects" Problem. It has been assumed that one could sensibly speak of a unitary object which is similarly cognized by all the persons whose actions are being studied, and that the persons vary only according to their affective relationship to the object. We called this an "attitude". In fact, there is considerable evidence which shows that probably no two people conceive of the same object in exactly the same way. That is, each person cognizes somewhat different facets of the object. Perhaps, then, they are not responding to exactly the same object, but rather to different sets of facets. It should follow that their attitudes are toward different facets, and that the logically possible sets of behavior alternatives are different for each person. Moreover, it stands to reason that the more one knows about an object the more facets he "sees". The more facets one "sees", the more the opportunity he has for mixed feelings. What may be a unitary object to an uninformed person may function as several objects for a knowledgeable person. He may have different attitudes toward each of the various objects or facets he sees. So he may not really have an attitude toward the object as a whole. On the other hand, up to a point it may be that the less a person knows about the object the more likely he is to have an attitude toward it as a whole. It seems to follow that the more a person knows about something the less effective is the present system in predicting his behavior. In the extreme it would seem that the system can only work for predicting the actions of relatively ignorant people.

How strong is this argument? If true, it could be quite devastating. Of course it should apply to all attitude research. Yet to date attitude research seems to work. Probably few have such detailed perceptions of facets of objects that we really cannot have an attitude toward any particular object as a whole, provided it is commonly defined as a whole. Hence, the system probably should not be abandoned because of this. Even so, the possibility that

difference in knowledge might affect its usefulness should not be ignored.

The Problem in Determining the Dimensions of Behavior Alternatives.

The question of how to treat the behavior alternatives is a difficult one. We speak of favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward an object, and this makes psychological sense--people seem to have affective orientations to objects. But what is a "favorable" action with respect to an object? In concrete research situations we often find it easy to imagine exactly which overt action dimensions we wish to study. Yet, if we are to develop a more complete theory we need to have a set of principles which tell us in advance which, among all possible overt behavior dimensions, are the most relevant for research on action with respect to a certain kind of object. What we do now is to build our research design around predicting behavior along a certain behavior dimension or class of dimensions (such as differential discrimination, differential goal achievement, joining or not joining an organization), conceptualize and measure an attitude variable relevant to that behavior dimension, and proceed from there. Researchers usually ask, "What attitude variable is the most relevant for predicting behaviors with respect to X objects?" Suppose another kind of question was asked, "What are all the behavior dimensions by which we may logically describe overt behaviors toward a specific object of a certain attitude variable?" As things stand now, the research would not get very far. What, for example, are the overt behavioral expressions which logically follow from negative affect toward an object? Avoidance? Destruction of the object? Obviously there is more to it than this. Perhaps even more important, how can we tell in advance what are the behavioral dimensions to look for? And do the behavioral dimensions flowing from such negative attitudes have parallel counterparts in the overt behavioral expressions of the positive attitudes? That is, are such overt dimensions unidimensional along the whole range of behaviors which are expressions of both positive and negative attitudes? For the present,

one would suppose that we will continue to develop our research designs by working backwards from the behaviors we wish to predict. But sometime we will have to learn how to tell in advance exactly which overt behavior dimensions are consequences of a certain attitude variable.

Himmelstrand's Problem. A Swedish sociologist, Ulf Himmelstrand, has discovered that there are people who are concerned with talking about possible overt behaviors and there are others who are concerned with performing them. These might be called something like "idealogically-oriented" people and "action-oriented" people. He has a set of questions which (with minor modifications) distinguish between these types in areas seemingly as far apart as child-rearing practices and party politics[12]. Naturally, the present system is limited to people whose attitudes have their end-products in action with respect to the object of the attitude. We need to find out whether there are stable personality or social situational factors which account for the fact that some people shy away from expressing their attitudes in appropriate actions. Perhaps Himmelstrand's problem presents just another set of differential facilitation variables. If it is more serious, however, it might require revision of the scheme.

Social Psychology and Related Subjects

In this view, social psychology's task is to develop a logically consistent, parsimonious, and empirically valid theory of the differential action of persons. That is, it is the study of the forces which validly explains acts. If this is so, then social psychology is more than the study of personality, although since persons have attitudes and attitudes are partly a result of other aspects of personality, and moreover, since other aspects of personality condition the person's attempts to enact his attitudes, it is clear that the field must be concerned with personality to explain and predict acts.

Again, viewed in this way the central focus of social psychology is not the study of human behavior in general. Acts are but one class of behavior. Social psychology is concerned with that class.

Neither is social psychology restricted to the study of interaction. Interaction in which the attitudes and overt behaviors of one person influence the attitudes (and thus personalities) and overt behaviors of another, is an important special case of action. Hence it does fall within the subject matter of social psychology. Indeed one of the main charges to social psychology is to explain and predict outcomes of interaction. As a matter of fact, it may be that the best approach to developing a system to do so lies in the careful formulation of a system for explaining and predicting action outcomes.

Again, conceived in this way, social psychology is not the study of communication, although communication--and especially language--provides content and processes which are exceedingly important in the explanation and prediction of action.

Perhaps, on the positive side, it is clear by now why this view of social psychology is compatible with the view that it is the study of social structure and personality. In a few words, this because persons (organisms with cognitive and affective orientations to objects) act with respect to socially-structured alternatives, because personality (the cognitive and affective relation of a person to objects) itself is developed in socially structured situations, and because--although we have not developed this point above--social structure is itself formed by and changes with the actions, interactions and expectations (a class of attitudes) of persons..

As we have discussed it here, social psychology is a distinct field having close theoretical ties to both sociology and psychology. It is not difficult to say that it is "just a branch" of either, and many people have in fact called it a branch of one or the other. Psychology proper is not

concerned with actions as such. It is concerned with behavior in general or with the study of individual personalities. Social psychology is only indirectly concerned with either; its direct concern is the explanation and prediction of the action of persons, which is a special case of behavior, and which involves the study of personality only insofar as the latter affects action. Sociology on the other hand, is not directly concerned with action of persons as such, but rather with the states and changes of social systems. It depends upon social psychology, however, because actions are among the basic units of social systems. But social psychology is dependent upon both fields. It rests in part on pscyhology because of the latter's concern with personality, cognition, and affect. It rests on sociology because of this field's systematic analysis of social structural variables. As things stand now, it probably cannot be reduced to either. But such a reduction could occur if it could be shown that the minute details of social organization in fact account empirically for all of the behaviors of persons which we call action; this would make it part of sociology. Or it could occur if general principles of the behavior of organisms could be shown to explain and predict what we call action; this would make it part of psychology.

But whatever theoretic convergences may occur in the distant future, there is plenty of work for specialized social psychologists to do now in their attempts to develop a valid explanation of action. The practical and theoretical pay-off of this, both to its parent disciplines and to other areas, should be great indeed in that it should bring order into a chaotic host of special problems that perplex us today because we are unable to explain and predict the actions relevant to them.

FOOTNOTES

1/ M. B. Smith, "Recent Developments in the Field of Social Psychology", The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 1961, V. 338, pp. 137-143; J. M. Yinger, "Research Implications of a Field View of Social Psychology", American Journal of Sociology, March, 1963, pp. 580-592; J. M. Yinger, Toward A Field View of Social Psychology, McGraw Hill Book Co., 1965, Chapts. 2-5; A. Inkeles, "Personality and Social Structure", in R. K. Merton, L. Broom, and L. S. Cottrell, Jr. (eds.), Sociology Today: Problems and Prospects, Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1959, pp. 249-278.

2/ See R. B. Cattell, Personality: A Systematic, Theoretical and Factual Study, Mc-Graw Hill Book Co., 1950; also R. B. Cattell, Personality and Motivation: Structure and Measurement, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1957.

3/ There may be some cases where this does not occur, such as when fanatics might find their determination to act made firmer by an increase in resistance.

4/ This and all other principles assume levels of facilitation higher than zero.

5/ We must therefore have ways of discovering what people's attitudes are. We do this by observing certain overt actions (which are logically subject to the same explanatory system as are any other actions), namely, persons' responses to instruments designed to elicit under standard conditions their attitudes toward objects. Such instruments are valid to the extent that standardizing the conditions for eliciting these responses encourages frank verbal expression of the internal attitude. But these verbal expressions are not the attitude itself; it is not directly accessible to the observer. (Replying to a question is itself an act; it is an attitudinally-directed behavior with respect to question. As such it must be subject to the same laws as is any other act.)

Attitudes may be held toward particular objects, or toward clases of objects. People may have attitudes toward a particular person, John, provided he is conceptualized by them as a unit. Or they may have attitudes toward classes of objects, such as delinquent boys (of which John may be a member) or such as males (of which all delinquent boys are members, and of which John is a member). To use attitudes to predict overt action with respect to an object, we must be certain that our instruments do in fact measure attitudes toward that object, rather than another. If we wish to explain and predict differences among persons in discriminating behavior (an action variable) toward Ojibwa Indians, the class "Ojibwa Indians" is the object of the attitude. John Eagle, a particular Ojibwa, is not the object. On the other hand, if we wish to determine who will and who will not discriminate against John Eagle, we must ask attitude-eliciting questions about him, not about Ojibwas in general.

There is a principle underlying this point. Facilitation (defined below) being equal, the more inclusive the class which is the object

of an attitude, the lower the correlation between the attitude variable and overt action with respect to any one member of the class; and conversely, the less inclusive the object of an attitude, the higher the correlation between the attitude variable and overt action with respect to any one member of the class.

6/ See T. Parsons and E. A. Shils, "Values, Motives, and Systems of Action" in T. Parsons and E. A. Shils (eds.), Toward A General Theory of Action, Harvard University Press, 1951, pp. 47-275, esp. p. 53.

7/ This work was begun in 1957 and it is to be completed in 1967 or 1968. Preliminary publications on it include I. W. Miller and A. O. Haller, "A Measure of Level of Occupational Aspiration", Personnel and Guidance Journal, January, 1964, pp. 448-455; and A. O. Haller and I. W. Miller, The Occupational Aspiration Scale: Theory, Structure and Correlates, Michigan State Univ., Agri. Exp. Sta. Tech. Bul. 288, 1963.

8/ See A. J. Diekema, Level of Occupational Aspiration, Performance in College, and Facilitation: A Preliminary Test of Certain Postulates Concerning the Relationship between Attitude and Behavior, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, 1965.

9/ Note that this implies another principle: the higher the level of either the attitude variable or of facilitation the higher the correlation between the other and the level of overt behavior with respect to the object of the attitude or with related objects.

10/ This is a case of contingent behavior alternatives; we referred to it earlier.

11/ See I. W. Miller and A. O. Haller, op. cit.; also A. O. Haller and I. W. Miller, op. cit.

12/ V. Himmelstrand, Social Pressures, Attitudes and Democratic Processes, Almqvist and Wiksell, Stockholm, 1960.